Green Yes. Red No.

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, October 20, 2008

About a month ago, I came upon a car accident at a signalized intersection. One car was completely flipped over and on the opposite side of the road. The other car was spun around in the intersection. I stopped to speak to people on the scene and the police. Apparently, a middle-aged driver blatantly ran a red light, striking the other car and flipping it over. Luckily, no one died.

In 2006, almost 900 Americans were killed and an estimated 144,000 were injured in crashes that involved red-light runners. About half of the deaths in red-light-running crashes are pedestrians and occupants in other vehicles.

With the City of San Jose's nearly 900 signalized intersections, it's impossible to have a police officer on every corner. Also, having police sit at intersections probably isn't the best use of their time when you take into consideration that they are investigating and catching those who commit crimes like kidnapping, sexual assault, murder, burglary and vandalism, as well as gang intervention and undercover work to catch copper-wire thieves … and the list goes on.

Last year, when I chaired the traffic-calming meetings, we prepared a survey with a list of about 15 questions. People who attended (and those who didn't) were invited to participate in the survey that was available via the web and hard copy. From the surveys returned, 90 percent of the respondents supported red-light cameras.

I was already supportive of using these cameras, and the surveys cemented my support. Red-light running cameras are legal according to our state vehicle code and are used today in Albuquerque, Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, DC, plus many smaller communities. They take video of cars that run red lights 24/7. If a person receives a ticket from running a red light then he or she will pay a fine, of which approximately 14 percent goes to the city. Since most cities are facing tough economic

times, the vendors of this technology have now made arrangements to give the technology to cities for free and instead be paid a percentage of the cities' share of the citation.

The cameras also provide valuable information to our Department of Transportation on intersections that could be improved to avoid future car and /or pedestrian accidents.

I submitted a memo to council that asked that we do a pilot program for one year to gauge the effectiveness of cameras at intersections. The council accepted the memo and passed it on to the Chief of Police for review and feedback. Unfortunately, the Chief does not agree with the program and asked that the city "terminate" the idea. However, the Transportation and Environment committee was not yet ready to do so, and asked for more information to be brought back to the committee within the next month or so. (Prior to my memo, former Vice Mayor Cindy Chavez had pushed for red light cameras but was unsuccessful.)

Technology will not replace our police officers or stop all crimes or red-light runners. However, in my opinion, utilizing technology (especially in this case) could prove to be beneficial in lowering the number of red-light runners, provide some income to the City and influence people's driving habits to obey the law.

The Police Department, like our Fire Department, is a core service. Fire Departments support smoke detectors; police, in my opinion, should consider supporting cameras at intersections. Smoke detectors haven't put the Fire Department out of business; red light running cameras won't put the SJPD out of business.

Do you think that red-light running is serious? If so, do you support using technology to make people think twice about running a red light?

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